

□

Waukegan, IL - U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk gathered federal, state and local officials for a conference announcing plans for the final cleanup of Waukegan harbor. Using mostly federal funds, the cleanup will lift property values in Lake County by over \$800 million and will eliminate a 40-year old threat to human health.

Kirk secured \$1.4 million last year to replace the city's water line – a line that blocked the dredging needed for the environmental restoration of the harbor. The line has been replaced, paving the way for the final cleanup.

Kirk also announced that with \$2.6 million in additional federal funds he obtained, Waukegan's outer harbor will be cleaned next year.

"We agree that no single project is more important to future incomes of Waukegan families than the environmental restoration of the harbor," said Congressman Kirk. "Next year -- for the first time in 37 years -- we will clean the outer harbor using federal funds.

The decisions we make at this conference will lay the foundation for finishing the environmental restoration by also cleaning the inner harbor. Waukegan has the opportunity to follow the success of Racine and Kenosha where the economy is booming after their environmental cleanups."

Colonel Gary Johnson of the Army Corps of Engineers provided details on the outer harbor cleanup, now funded and scheduled for next year. Col. Johnson explained that an inner harbor cleanup would complete the final phase of Waukegan's environmental restoration. Once funding and the final plan is secured, the project could be complete by 2010.

While most of the Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) dumped by Outboard Marine Corporation (OMC) were removed in the 1980s, some PCBs still contaminate Waukegan Harbor. "OMC's dumping of PCBs into our harbor is one of the worst examples of corporate irresponsibility I have ever seen," said Kirk. PCBs from the now bankrupt OMC led the federal government to listing Waukegan Harbor as one of the first sites listed as a "National Priority" under the Superfund program. In 1981, the federal government listed the harbor as an official "Great Lakes Area of Concern."

Underscoring the need for harbor cleanup, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources issued a fish consumption advisory for white suckers and sunfish living in the harbor, warning people they contain PCBs.

The environmental restoration of Waukegan Harbor will also open one of the largest economic development projects in northern Illinois. Surrounded by 1,600 lakefront acres and well served by mass transit, the redevelopment of the harbor will follow the economic successes of Racine

and Kenosha harbors. A recent study by the Northeast-Midwest Institute found that harbor cleanup would add \$800 million to Lake County property values, including \$53,000 per home in Waukegan. Their estimates show that the City of Waukegan has lost \$257 million in home values due to harbor pollution.

"Under Mayor Hyde, a renaissance of Waukegan is underway," said Kirk. "Reopening the Genesee Theater and the ongoing revitalization of our downtown area put Waukegan back on the map. But Waukegan's true economic potential lies in the cleanup of her harbor. The future of Lake County's economy depends on the environmental restoration of Waukegan harbor."

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the final cleanup of Waukegan Harbor will require \$35 million in federal funding, provided through the Great Lakes Legacy Act program. All study and planning costs can be paid for by the federal government. Under current law, the federal government will pay two thirds of the project's construction costs.

The remaining one third can be shared by local businesses, city, county and state governments. The EPA and Army Corps estimate that the federal government will be able to provide \$23 million for the project, backed by a local match of \$12 million. Local businesses expressed an interest in helping the harbor cleanup, offering the possibility of a public-private partnership to complete the cleanup.

Congressman Kirk joined Waukegan Mayor Richard Hyde, Acting Region V EPA Administrator Bharat Mathur, Colonel Gary Johnson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Illinois EPA Director Doug Scott, Todd Goeks, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Paul Geiselhart, Waukegan Citizens Advisory Group, Cameron Davis, Alliance for the Great Lakes, Ann Maine, Lake County Board Commissioner and Tim Gabrielse, Gabe's construction, at the conference.

Contact: Matt Towson
847-940-0202
cell: 773-454-5396